



Running off the Rails

Making Virtual Tours Audience Driven Experiences

Live Means Adaptive

Planning for a broadcast can be harrowing; between getting the technology together, making sure you can be clearly heard, and providing for accessibility like closed-captioning, it takes a lot of planning to go live. You might even try scripting what you plan to say – planning all the stops for your train ahead of time.

The amazing possibilities of technology mean we don't need to be stuck on tracks – and we shouldn't! Nearly every technology includes some way for visitors to talk back – a chat or comment feature or live emoji stream. You can harness them to make these experience interactive and more engaging – to take your visitors to any stop in your park they want.

Let Their Curiosity Shine

The visitor is in the driver's seat during a live broadcast. Let their questions and interests drive what you share and how you interact. Did a visitor chat that they want to see something sitting on the table of this historic house up close? Take the camera right up to the object. Is someone wondering what that tree's bark smells like? Stick your nose against the trunk and describe it for them. Are they wondering what that monument in the distance is? Time to walk over and talk about it, instead of the thing you planned to talk about.

The curiosity of the visitor is what shines in a live broadcast – it's all about the interpreter functioning as a proxy for the visitor in the real space. They can't visit your park, so you are their puppet helping them visit it at a distance.

Live broadcasts have the potential to be audience centered, resource driven experiences – the visitor is the battery that powers the engagement, and the resource is the light that shines.

Beyond the Velvet Rope

Is there somewhere in your park you can't take people? Maybe the curator would freak out if you took 30 visitors traipsing through that historic bedroom. Maybe the naturalist would freak out if you took every visitor up to stand with their nose an inch from that thousand year old tree.

When you're broadcasting live, you can break those rules. Imagine dragging 3,000 visitors into the bedroom to explore. Imagine 3,000 eyes all inspecting that bark.

Audience Driven Virtual Tours need to step beyond the boundaries where we normally stop our visitors – because they can! They offer us amazing ways to allow visitors access without damaging fragile resources.



It's Not Just Virtual

Audience Driven Experiences – where the visitors drive what parts of the resource to investigate – are an important step on the road to Audience Centered Experiences. And the idea's not new!

Brian Forist at Indiana University Bloomington has advocated for interpretive deconstruction, where visitors interests and curiosity drives every interpretive experience in a park. Visitors ask questions about things in the resource that interest them, and the ranger helps light up the resource for them.

